Public Diplomacy in Uniform: The Role of the U.S. Department of Defense in Supporting Modern Day Public Diplomacy

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Introduction

The necessity to fight a 'war of ideas' against extremism and to 'win hearts and minds' has led to an increasing need for the Pentagon to be involved in supporting public diplomacy efforts. Longer engagements abroad, such as the continued military mission in Afghanistan, have made outreach to local populations a necessary part of accomplishing military missions. In addition, the classification of Iraq and Afghanistan as either insecure or active combat zones makes it difficult for the U.S. Department of State (DOS) to carry out their regular activities, such as public diplomacy, without military support and protection. Since the abolishment of the US Information Agency (USIA) in 1999 and in the wake of the September 11th attacks the Pentagon has gotten progressively more involved in public diplomacy-type activities. Still, there is an ongoing debate about whether Americans should be represented abroad by people in civilian clothing or by soldiers in combat boots (Brian E. Carlson 2010).

There are three Department of Defense (DOD) activities that can be construed as overlapping with public diplomacy: Information Operations (IO), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Public Affairs (PA).

This paper looks at Department of Defense programs that could be construed as public diplomacy (PD) efforts and analyzes how they fit in with the State Department public diplomacy mandate. It seeks to understand why the DOD is engaging in these activities, what their mission is, and what groups they are targeting as an intended audience. The paper concludes by discussing whether DOD should or should not be involved in public diplomacy-related activities.

Afghanistan

Military Communication with Foreign Audiences:

The military uses several different tools to engage foreign audiences in order to advance US interests. These include: information operations (IO), psychological operations (PSYOP) and Public Affairs (PA). These activities all utilize the overarching concept of "strategic communications" (SC), which are defined as:

"…focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives..." (JP 3-13 2006, I-10)

Strategic communication as a concept was developed within the last ten years by military officials, such as General Petraeus, who recognized that the global war on terror could not be won with guns alone. Strategic communications is a learning process intended to take advantage of the value of relationships, experiential learning, and other factors that go into true, effective communication with foreign audiences (Brian E. Carlson 2010).

Commando Solo, USAF broadcasting aircraft

Interestingly, this type of military activity is not only conducted in conflict zones, but can also be used to forestall conflict in more peaceful regions. In an interview, Mark Davidson, a senior foreign service public diplomacy officer who has been intimately involved in State-DOD discussions over the proper relationship between civilian-led PD and military information operations, questioned whether it was in the best interest of the U.S. that the military should engage with civilians in countries outside of combat areas around the world, stating: "I think that no one questions the validity of the DOD going into war zones and interacting in ways that are necessary to winning wars. In places that people aren't shooting at us, the DOD probably has very little business going…" (Mark Davidson 2010). From a military standpoint, Col. Stephen Perkins argues that military outreach to foreign audiences could serve as a "non-kinetic force multiplier" that could help mitigate or even resolve emerging challenges (Col. Stephen P. Perkins 2006, 5).

Information Operations:

Information Operations serves as an umbrella for several military capabilities, including electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, operations security and military deception. IO is a coordinating concept, not a capability (JP 3-13 2006, I-1). Successful IO coordinates and de-conflicts different capabilities in order to support a military mission (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010). IO activities are meant to affect decisions and the decision-making process through use of influence, disruption, corruption or usurpation (JP 3-13 2006, I-6).

Central to both IO and public diplomacy efforts is the goal of identifying cultural and political factors that can influence public opinion. A fundamental difference between the two

disciplines is the military's focus on achieving 'mission success.' In contrast to the goal-driven nature of military IO, public diplomacy can often involve cultural and education activities aimed at improving long-term relations in less tangible ways, such as to promoting understanding of American values that could help with foreign relations during a *future* crisis. The tendency for IO to be viewed as a one-way blast of information can limit opportunities for important dialogue and discourse with local populations, which is an integral part of public diplomacy.

In the past ten years, IO has grown as an area of interest. A 2006 revision of IO doctrine aimed to add defense support to public diplomacy and clarify the role of civil military operations in this arena (JP 3-13 2006). While there are still no flag officer positions stemming from IO, rear Admiral Gregory Smith, a U.S. Navy Public Affairs Officer, was recently promoted and given a second star to serve as deputy to General Petraeus. As part of his duties, he handles IO in Afghanistan (Brian E. Carlson 2010).

Psychological Operations (Military Information Support Operations):

PSYOP is the element of IO that is most closely related to public diplomacy, although the two differ in important respects. According to JP3-13 Psychological Operations are defined as:

"Planned operations to convey selected truthful information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of their governments, organizations, groups, and individuals…" (JP 3-13 2006, II-1)

Broadly speaking, the goal of PSYOP either to: (1) deliver information to key leadership in order to deter behavior that violates U.S. national interest, or (2) to target a specific foreign population in order to create separation from the adversary state leadership and build internal pressure (Col. Blane R. Clark 2010). At first glance, PD and PSYOP can be seen as largely overlapping activities. Both seek to use media, print and other media to reach a foreign target audience (TA). In practice, the two diverge on certain key points:

PSYOP seeks to influence public opinion in a specific direction that advances U.S. interests. Public diplomacy, in contrast, tends to focus on broader goals, such as dialogue, cultural

exchange, and correction of misunderstandings. It seeks to educate and inform rather than influence opinion in a specific direction.

PSYOP is directed at a target region or audience that is critical to mission success, whereas PD is generally meant to address an entire country or region.

PSYOP deals with dissemination of information on specific issues that influence mission success. PD broaches a wide range of issues that pertain to US policy, such as trade policies, public health, foreign relations and education.

The potential for classification or secrecy in PSYOP is not consistent with the open and public conduct of public diplomacy.

In 2010, the name 'PSYOP' officially changed to Military Information Support Operations (MISO). The decision was based on the potential negative connotations to the term 'psychological operations,' in addition to a feeling that the term was inadequate to encompass all PSYOP activities. For example, military broadcasts in post-earthquake Haiti telling people where they could get food were technically PSYOP (Marc Ambinder 2010). Colonel Ayers noted that the name change had no effect on the substantive activities towards foreign audiences, and that it was unlikely to catch on among some of the older military leadership (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010).

Public Affairs:

Leaflet drop in the Iraqi desert

Public Affairs (PA) can be directed at both external and internal audiences that interact with DOD. The defining characteristic of Public Affairs is the need to maintain credibility – the ability to communicate DOD themes and messages clearly, and to counter misinformation and false conceptions regarding US policy (JP 3-13 2006, II-8). Col. Carl Ayers (Ret.) observed that diplomacy is the act of talking and listening whereas PA exists to stand behind a podium and give American opinion. For PA to be effective, he said, it has to be pervasive, and that it takes patience. He noted that these were particular strengths of the military (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010).

The field of Public Affairs within the military has been impeded by a training deficit and lack of professional opportunities within the specialization. In a 2006 speech, former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld noted that, in some cases, military PA officials had little training in digital and broadcasted media. He also commented that PA posts were not seen as career enhancing within the military due to the fact that dealing with unfavorable media perception could tarnish one's image (Donald H. Rumsfeld 2006). The result is a tendency for PA to turn into a static field with no room for innovation or risk-taking.

Iraq Public Affairs

Training is integral to effective PA, and even unintentional oversights can be damaging to US credibility. In one example, a former USIA official criticized the military for paying over $300 million to Iraqi journalists to write news stories in the local media that were favorable to the US. He noted that he had never paid for foreign media placement because that would jeopardize his credibility with local media contacts (Guy W. Farmer 2005). This type of behavior, even conducted unwittingly, crosses the line between advertising (or even propaganda) and public affairs.

Defining Public Diplomacy

Secretary Gates noted that it would take an accumulation of quiet successes over a long period of time to discredit and defeat extremist movements and their ideologies (Robert Gates 2009). The acknowledgement that these successes will be accomplished using a combination of hard and soft power is key, and the practice of public diplomacy is a strong tool of soft power. It is an adjunct of traditional diplomacy, and a specialized area that needs to be carefully and deliberately conducted by trained professionals (Fawzia Sheikh 2008).

State Department Spokesman P.J. Crowley

The US Code of Law Assigns the Conduct of Public Diplomacy (PD) to the Department of State under Title 22, whereas military budgets and conduct are regulated under Title 10. Because the Department of Defense and the Department of State are under separate budgetary authorities, the funding for public diplomacy-related missions is determined separately, even if the missions overlap in practical application.

Title 22 instructs the Secretary of State to make public diplomacy an integral component of US foreign policy, to work in conjunction with the Broadcasting Board of Governors to develop a comprehensive strategy for the use of PD resources, and to set long-term measurable objectives.

Specifically, Title 22 States that public diplomacy efforts shall include:

"…targeting developed and developing countries and select and general audiences, using appropriate media to properly explain the foreign policy of the United States to the governments and populations of such countries, with the objectives of increasing support for United States policies and providing news and information."

Other definitions, such as a 1997 definition by USIA go beyond a foreign policy objective to include U. S. national interests and the development of long-term relationships.

Strengths of State Department Public Diplomacy

Cultural sensitivity is a challenging, yet integral part of effective communication. Knowledge of language, regional politics and development requires a long-term investment in understanding foreign cultures, and the contribution of PD experts, academics and the private sector. Without this finely tuned capability, "we are just putting out noise." (Deidre Collings and Rafal Rohozinski 2008, p. 29) Mark Davidson, currently the Public Affairs Officer for DOS in Pakistan expressed: "We believe thoroughly that we are as pointy as any spear that the DOD wields in this day and age." (Mark Davidson 2010).

Public diplomacy as conducted by USIA and now the State Department has several important features:

There is the inherent capacity to build long term relationships, working on a different time horizon than military missions.

While there is some overlap with DOD PSYOP, it also focuses on areas, such as cultural exchanges and language programming that the DOD would never undertake.

It implements an approach to media, broadcasting and dissemination of American values and culture that is specially tailored to promote dialogue and understanding of a variety of issues to a wide audience.

A significant benefit to relying on DOS for PD related activities is that the State Department is not concerned with having an "exit strategy." Whether it is six months, a year or eighteen months in the future, public diplomacy outreach continues on into the horizon. In addition, the State Department supports the full range of US foreign policy abroad – business treaties, economic development, human rights. This capacity for complexity and depth is simply not integrated into a military IO solution (Brian E. Carlson 2010).

Print and Televised Media:

The State Department often reaches out to foreign audiences through local media. The Public Affairs Officer within an embassy takes the lead on media relations. Texts of public

speeches, statements, articles or op-eds must be submitted to the PAO as part of the clearance process (David D. Pearce 1995). From a DOS perspective, close relationships with local reporters and journalists are beneficial to both sides. Providing accurate and honest information to local news sources promotes a credible relationship between reporters and embassy staff. In addition, questions asked by the journalists can be highly indicative of public opinion and help to inform embassy staff (Robert J. Callahan 2006). A journal article from 2008 suggests: "strengthening local communication efforts and engaging foreign media to influence media coverage of the United States should be a priority for public diplomacy efforts." (Erik Nisbet and James Shanahan 2008, p.29)

A Comparative Look at Media Approaches:

How far can the relationship with foreign media go without being too close for comfort (or for credibility)? Some of the DOD interactions with foreign media have pushed the limit of this question. Mark Whitehouse, Director of Global Media Initiatives for IREX, a contractor that was given $1.69 million for journalism consulting services in Iraq was quoted as saying: "DOD is, in my opinion, not the right contractor for media development. They have PSYOP needs…and media development is a very different thing." (Erik Nisbet and James Shanahan 2008, p. 20)

One challenge in dealing with foreign media is to appear to project a balanced point of view. For example, shortly before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the DOD began crafting a plan to establish free media within Iraq post-invasion. Robert Reilly, former Director of Voice of America was hired to be Project Director of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) (Peter Cary 2010, p.16). The project faced credibility issues, as the network was instructed to run 'endless' coverage of Coalition

Provisional Authority (CPA) conferences, and produced little to no independent content. Meanwhile, Congress was having trouble distinguishing between the goal of IMN and the Broadcasting Board of Governors' $100 million a year program to broadcast into the Middle East over Radio Sawa and the TV station al-Hurra (Peter Cary 2010, p.17). In this context, it would appear that Radio Sawa and al-Hurra were already undertaking the task of communicating with foreign audiences with the supervision of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and public diplomacy professionals.

There are certainly success stories of DOD outreach efforts. For example, when Muqtada Al-Sadr's supporters announced that there would be a "million man march" in support of their leader, US military coverage of the event was captured on video feed and sent to local news outlets. It was able to demonstrate that a maximum of 10,000 showed up, that most were not holding pictures of Al-Sadr but of the Iraqi flag (Deidre Collings and Rafal Rohozinski 2008, p.9).

Cultural Centers and Education Exchanges:

Cultural Centers, American Corners and exchange programs, such as the Fulbright program, are effective tools of public diplomacy that are simply not under the purview of any DOD mission. They are long-term, relationship-building programs that are not necessarily tied to immediate 'mission success.' PSYOP is meant to 'influence,' whereas education and cultural centers are truly the rubric of USAID and DOS (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010).

Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy McHale cuts the opening ribbon for a new American Center in Jakarta

American Centers (staffed by American employees) and American Corners exist to provide educational, cultural and language materials to foreign audiences.

Mark Davidson, a career FSO, questioned whether military institutions could not really credibly sponsor cultural centers. He pointed to the Confucian Centers that have been established in the United States. The Centers are sponsored by the Chinese Office of Language Council International, and promote understanding of Chinese language, culture and values. What if the People's Liberation Army sponsored these centers? Would people view them the same way? The foreign public would probably view them much differently (Mark Davidson 2010).

Defense Support to Public Diplomacy and the Office of Strategic Influence

The military does not conduct public diplomacy. The Department of Defense supports U. S. public diplomacy efforts and carries out its own operations in support of military missions. The Pentagon does, however, play a key role in providing security, tactical and logistical support to civilian public diplomacy missions, and may be more involved in these efforts in conflict zones that are unsafe for routine civilian activities (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010). Accordingly, in certain situations, the military may be called upon to plan logistics, timelines, budgets and security in support of DOS public diplomacy missions (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010). The process is meant to be collaborative, and to be consistent with the needs of the Ambassador of a given region in addition to being

consistent with military strategic goals. Certainly military support is necessary in areas that are ongoing conflict zones where it would be unsafe for civilians to carry on their normal activities.

The military has made several attempts at labeling this process, though some of these efforts have received criticism for supposed propaganda, lack of transparency, and a level of secrecy and classification that could potentially challenge the credibility of DOD efforts. For example, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD) was created in 2006 "to promote US foreign policy objectives by seeking to understand, inform, and influence foreign audiences and opinion makers and to broaden the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad." (JP 3-13 2006, II-10) The goal was to form a strong partnership with DOS and other departments to help create a common operating picture (COP) for public diplomacy (Michael Doran 2007). It was closed in spring 2009 amidst accusations that it lacked transparency and had overstepped its mandate. American military officers in Afghanistan were reportedly upset by talking points issued by the office on controversial matters, such as civilian casualties. It was reported that they "predicted that the information would be seen by the Afghan public as blatant propaganda, and they refused to use them." (Thom Shanker 2009)

A predecessor to DSPD, the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) was created after the 9/11 attacks and abolished in 2002 in response to rumors that it intended to provide misinformation and propaganda to foreign news sources and to punish those who conveyed the wrong message.

Budget Constraints:

Certainly, there are constraints to creating new institutions for public diplomacy. Since the end of the Cold War the USG has relied on military forces to be the face of overseas engagement. The abolishment of USIA in 1999 left a public policy void, filled by the State Department on a comparatively small budget. In addition, the label 'Global War on Terror' has widened the scope of activities that can be seen as within DOD budgetary authority under Title 10. This has resulted in a massive budget imbalance between DOD and DOS.

In a 2007 speech, Secretary Gates noted that the budget for DOD (excluding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) was nearly half a trillion dollars, in contrast to a $36 billion budget request by the State Department for foreign affairs (Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates 2007). This gap has only grown since 2007. The 2011 budget request for State and USAID is $52.8 billion; DOD's request is for $708.2 billion (Peter Cary 2010, p.5). The best estimate for the Public Diplomacy budget for FY 2010 is around $1.3 billion and the amount requested for FY 2011 was also around $1.3 billion (Rebecca Williams 2010). Considering that this money is spent on a whole range of activities, including diplomatic and consular programming, educational and cultural exchanges, and East-West centers, it is impressive how far it goes.

Secretary Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mullen

There is an ongoing debate about whether DOS is prepared to receive a large influx of funding. Mark Davidson, a current DOS official, stated in an interview that he believes that every dollar spent will have more impact through DOS not only in funding a credible messenger, but in supporting the use of highly trained professionals and communicators who have a deep understanding of foreign cultures and languages (Mark Davidson 2010). Brian Carlson, a former USIA employee, expressed some doubt that DOS would be able to meticulously absorb more money for public diplomacy programming. He pointed out that any increase in budget for PD would need to come with clear restrictions so that there was not temptation for the "always - underfunded State Department" to spend it for other purposes, such as office supplies or other expenses (Brian E. Carlson 2010).

The Future of Public Diplomacy:

In a 2010 lecture at Kansas State University, Admiral Mike Mullen expressed the importance of using military power in conjunction with tools of 'soft power.' He stated: "My fear, quite frankly, is that we aren't moving fast enough in this regard. U.S. foreign policy is still too dominated by the military, too dependent upon the generals and admirals who lead our major

overseas commands. It's one thing to be able and willing to serve as emergency responders; quite another to always have to be the fire chief." (Admiral Michael G. Mullen 2010) Defense Secretary Gates and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton have also supported the idea of expanding soft power capabilities within the USG.

There are three broad categories of issues that need to be resolved in order for PD efforts between DOS and DOD to evolve: (1) The inter-agency community must decide what kind of institutional mechanism it wants to conduct public diplomacy; (2) The budget imbalance must be resolved accordingly; (3) There must be careful consideration of what type of image the U.S. wants to project to different audiences, and whether this image should come from civilian or military influence.

Creation of New Institutional Mechanisms to Deal with Public Diplomacy
One reason for the expansion of DOD public diplomacy capabilities is that the DOD expands to fill holes in USG capabilities. In the absence of sufficient funding for PD efforts in civilian organizations, DOD makes up for the deficit by increasing its own capabilities. Military capabilities, however, are not an effective substitute for civilian involvement and expertise (Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates 2007).

There are three options for how one could increase the public diplomacy capacity within the USG:

Recreate the USIA as a separate entity and modify it to address modern issues, such as the fight against extremism

Increase the public diplomacy capacity within the State Department, and create a stronger specialized PD cone

Create a separate institution, such as an FFRDC that would help facilitate public diplomacy efforts, but leave PD officially in the DOS.

The first option, recreating USIA, has some merit. USIA as an entity retained some distance from short-term foreign policies, and also served as a critical entity in integrating civilian and military instruments. A recent study by RAND concluded: "Unless a 'USIA' could be separated out from the Department of State by administrative action, Congress should reauthorize USIA,

fund it adequately, and enable it to make effective use of modern methods of communication and education." (Christopher Chivvis 2008)

The second suggestion, to strengthen the PD capacity within DOS is in keeping with efforts by Judith McHale, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy. In March 2010, she enumerated five goals for public diplomacy within the State Department, which included shaping the narrative, strengthening relationships abroad, combating extremism, and increasing coordination among policy objectives (Judith McHale, Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs 2010).

The third option, creating a smaller entity or FFRDC to research and disseminate material on US public diplomacy, would serve as a compromise in an environment where there may not be the political will or budget to start a new USIA-like entity.

Balancing the Budget:

Mark Davidson, PAO in Islamabad, asked some critical questions about the budget disparity between DOS and DOD. He stated: "We are (personal opinion) shooting ourselves in the feet by overfunding DOD and underfunding DOS in this area. It boils down to credibility and also touches on very basic issues of the American identity. Are we, like ancient Rome, a militarized superpower that engages with the world through our military? Or are we a different kind of country than that?" (Mark Davidson 2010)

Weaning public diplomacy efforts off of dependence on military budgets and missions and into long-term State Department run programs will be part of what helps pull the US and its allies out of the conflict. It will increase legitimacy of programs, and ensure that public diplomacy efforts will not be abandoned as soon as the military mission comes to an end.

This change will not occur overnight. The DOD has now spent almost a decade creating robust and capable information operations capabilities. To abolish these programs *in toto* would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. So the question asked should not be whether DOD is more capable, but if this trend should continue on into the future, or slowly transition into DOS (Peter Cary 2010, p.36).

Balance between Civilian and Military Engagement with Foreign Audiences
DOD and DOS activities can certainly overlap. In combat operations or insecure environments,

DOD may also tend to take on a PD capacity by necessity, as civilian agencies might be unable to perform their usual activities (Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense 2009).

Mark Davidson, currently the PAO in Pakistan asks: “In this day and age where too many people in the world think of helicopters and people in fatigues killing Muslims, are military channels really the most effective and credible ways to influence people?” Mark went on to express that he believes the USG is making a major misstep not by intention, but by inattention (Mark Davidson 2010).

What does it mean to be represented abroad by a military presence? Colonel Ayers said that he believes that public diplomacy with a uniformed presence is less of an issue. He noted that during his time in Cambodia his unit was supporting three NGOs, and that he never wore a uniform or carried a weapon. Likewise, during military presence in Haiti, soldiers were armed by did not wear helmets. The reason for uniformed presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, points out Ayers, is due to the fact that it is still a combat zone. Military presence in all non-combat arenas, he said, was at the request of the State Department and in accordance with the will of the Ambassador and the country’s strategic plan (Col. Carl Ayers, Ret. 2010).

General "Kip" Ward, AFRICOM Commander

Conclusion:

Military information operations and PSYOP rely on the belief that you can change the future through influence on foreign audiences. Public diplomacy conducted by the State Department fosters the understanding that you cannot predict the future, but you can prepare for it through education and cultural exchange.

sThe U.S. may have invented public relations, but we are not always effective at strategic communication. A foreign diplomat was quoted as asking: How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world's greatest communication society?" (Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates 2007) The answer is complex, and lies in the integration and differentiation of PD activities throughout the USG.

Unlike old wars, such as World War II, where countries were either at war or peace, modern conflicts are ongoing, and in some cases transcend national boundaries. Because of the long-term focus of the State Department, it is in a positive position to coordinate a 'whole of government' approach to international outreach. The problems are multifaceted and so must be the solutions (Brian E. Carlson 2010). In reference to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the use of 'soft power,' Admiral Mike Mullen stated: "We will win, but we will do so only over time and only after near-constant reassessment and adjustment…Quite frankly, it will feel a lot less like a knockout punch and a lot more like a recovering a from a long illness." (John J. Kruzel 2010) Mutual understanding of U.S. culture and values can help to avoid conflicts of the future and it is important to address this issue with tenacity and a sense of urgency. Public diplomacy, conducted by the State Department (or a USIA-like institution) with the appropriate support and cooperation of the U.S. military is an important part of the solution.

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